

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: WOODDOWN BOG

SITE CODE: 000694

Wooddown Bog NHA is situated approximately 4km east of Mullingar in the townlands of Curraghmore, Macetown and Wooddown in Co. Westmeath. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.

The site consists of a Midlands Raised Bog type, which has developed in a basin. The bog has good hummock/hollow microtopography but few pools. There is a small soak area situated close to the northern edge of the high bog. This area also supports a low canopy of Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) woodland. A small fen is located to the south-west of the bog. The cutover supports humid grassland, Birch and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub and woodland. There appears to be a flush on the cutover off the northern margin of the high bog.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog. Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum capillifolium* are the dominant species on the bog. Other common species include Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). Midland Raised Bog indicators include Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*), Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and bog moss *Sphagnum magellanicum*.

There are only a few pools on the bog, which is very dry. These pools support the bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, Common Cottongrass and White Beaked-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). There is good hummock/hollow microtopography where burning has not occurred. The hummocks comprise bog mosses, including *Sphagnum capillifolium*, Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Ling Heather and *Cladonia* Lichens

There is a flush and soak system on the northern margin of the highbog, which supports Downy Birch woodland with an understorey of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), the bog mosses *Sphagnum palustre*, *S. recurvum* var *tenu*e and the rare *S. fimbriatum* are also found in the flush.

To the south is an area of fen, which supports Long-stalked Yellow Sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*), Common Sedge (*C. nigra*), Bottle Sedge (*C. rostrata*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*).

Birch and mixed woodland occur on the north and north-east margin of the high bog on the cutover. The Birch woodland to the north of the site has Ling Heather, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and the bog mosses *Sphagnum palustre* and *S. capillifolium*. The woodland to the north-east also supports Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

The cutover, which contains areas of old peat cutting and active peat cutting, also supports Birch and Gorse scrub, flush vegetation, humid grasslands and forestry. Grassland is present on mineral soil to the west of the site.

Current landuse on the site includes active peat-cutting in the north-east and south-east of the site. Afforestation occurs on high bog and cutover to the east and on cutover to the south-east. Areas of cutover have been reclaimed for agricultural purposes around the site. The grassland is used for grazing. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage and burning of the high bog. These are all activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Wooddown Bog NHA is a site of conservation significance comprising as it does a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. This site supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats, including hummock/hollow complexes, a soak system and flushes, as well as a number of scarce plant species. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.